

# The sky's the limit...



It's the future of data storage and more, and it could work magic on your ICT budget... but what, actually, *is* cloud technology? **Paul Evans** runs through the FAQs

## 'Cloud technology'; what's it all about?

'Cloud services' is a blanket term, which can be further broken down into three categories: public, private and hybrid cloud – and if you use hotmail, gmail or online banking, for example, then you're already involved with the technology.

A public cloud service is always delivered off-site, over the internet, and offers the greatest level of efficiency in terms of shared resources between multiple end users. A private cloud serves a single organisation, which can allow a greater degree of flexibility in terms of customisation and control but requires the upfront purchase and on-going management of the necessary infrastructure and software.

A hybrid cloud, meanwhile, can include a variety of public and private cloud elements as well as on-premise infrastructure or services. This may offer benefits in terms of keeping each component efficient, but generally includes the added overhead of more complex security requirements and ensuring compatibility between the various elements.



## Where might the technology take us next?

The advent of cloud services has revolutionised the way in which all organisations – including schools – procure and utilise ICT. Services are now faster and usually cheaper to provision. The range of services available on a budget has also greatly increased. With ever improving broadband speeds, the number of applications and services available as a cloud service is likely to increase. While there may always be an argument for retaining some applications onsite, it's likely that all schools will be heavy users of cloud services in the near future.



## Why should schools, in particular, be looking at these kinds of services?

A major benefit of public cloud services, in particular, is a significantly reduced requirement for in-house IT resources, as well as a more streamlined infrastructure. Another key benefit that the cloud brings to schools is the ability to take advantage of feature-rich services at a very low cost, including remote backup, device management and e-safeguarding. In many cases, these services would simply be too expensive to implement on-premise for each school individually. Offered as a public cloud service, however, they can be provided for a very low cost per pupil or per site on a subscription basis with minimal or no upfront fees. The reason for this is that cloud providers often offer these services to many thousands of schools across the country and as a result, the overheads for maintenance are effectively split amongst each of these sites. This simple subscription fee model is also the total cost of ownership. It removes the need to account for increased electricity, insurance and management costs. It also offers greater flexibility than purchasing a solution outright, as the subscription can simply be cancelled whereas hardware and software require a much larger commitment, which typically must be made upfront. This makes cloud services a very attractive value proposition.

Cloud services, like any investment, need to be properly vetted to ensure they are fit for purpose. Schools should also be sure to check the credentials of the service provider as well, ensuring that they are reputable and experienced.



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## How have schools already benefited from cloud services?

By making use of IT services offered by a cloud service provider, schools are able to focus on their core objective, namely educating students. A good service provider will work to update their services in line with ever-changing government legislation and guidelines. As a result, schools are able to ensure they remain compliant with ever more stringent regulations without expending additional effort. In effect, the schools are outsourcing the risk of managing these services to a trusted, qualified third party.



### ABOUT THE EXPERT

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